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VADE MECUM, VOLVENTIBUS ANNIS

THE MAYANS
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TEXAS

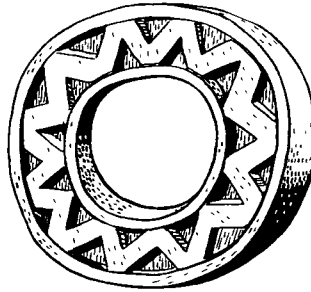
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PHILOSOPHY SERIES ONE

6th and 7th Degrees



YOUR HAPPINESS INCREASED BEING AN OPTIMIST

Beloved Companion:

The Companions are gathered again, around the great circular stone bench on the path called "The Walk of The Philosophers". Here, in spirit, are the Companions of these Degrees, and the Elders, the shades of ancient great ones of the Maya, - yes, and the spirits of other noble thinkers of other lands and other times. For the spirit of Philosophy is more than mortal and the change called "death" does not end the thoughts of the true Philosopher.

Instead, wherever philosophers gather together, think in solitude or discourse with one another, there are invoked the spirits of the other. Present in thought if not in body, the spirit of their good thoughts are palpable to the others. We, in these degrees, are yet Chela, - students, disciples. But, we too should by now have our Chela, or at least we soon should have, for poor indeed is a philosopher who must expound but to the air.

So, if you will picture this meeting of minds deep in this mystic tropic forest, you will discern old Plato and his followers, Confucius and his students, and others.

"Life is like any other friend," said Moo Lu Akin to his Chela. "Think the best of her, and she will do her best for you." And, he pointed out to those assembled, the following truths, to be sent to the distant Companions.

Most people earnestly wish to be optimists, and some sincerely prefer to be pessimists; but it often happens that neither one knows how to go about it. There is so much loose thinking on the subject that the average person doesn't get beyond the popular conception of these two viewpoints, and that isn't very far.

Since one's decision on this phase of his thinking is so important and determining, it is worthwhile to take the time and make the effort to consider the

matter with some care. Both the optimist and pessimist need to know what they are talking about and why they are what they are.

The average conception of an optimist is of a person who goes about calling everything good. No matter what the weather is, he likes it; and no matter what turn the affairs of life take, he claims to approve it. Every goose is a swan, and every cloud has a silver lining.

The popular conception of the pessimist is no better. It is of a person who goes about disliking everything, looking on the darker side of all that happens and pronounces calamity in the face of every happy turn of events. He is well represented by the old lady who, when asked about the state of her health, replied that she felt very well that day, but it always made her feel bad to feel good for she always knew she would feel worse afterward.

Anyone knows that neither of these viewpoints is right. A goose is not a swan, and a cloud with a silver lining rains just the same. On the other hand, the prophet of evil has to be blind to the facts in order to see everything in a setting of shadow. Life and its passing days is neither all pleasure nor all pain, so both these popular conceptions are either thoughtless or insincere.

Some definitions are facetious as well as misleading. A current joke years ago was that an optimist is one who goes about contracting bills he cannot pay, while a pessimist is one who tries to collect them the first of the month. These may have something to do with the satisfaction of living and the lack of it, but they are not definitions of optimism and pessimism.

Then there was a clever rhyme that put it in the figure of a doughnut. The optimist, it said, was the one who sees the doughnut, and the pessimist the one who sees the hole. But every doughnut has a hole in it, and every hole in a doughnut has dough around it. What kind of regard for the facts would it be to disregard either one?

One of the best definitions the writer ever heard in the popular vein was given by a Negro girl who, with her race, had seen much of the ups and downs of life. An optimist, she said, is one who takes the lemons the world hands him and makes lemonade of them. That is a hint of the truth, but only a hint.

In any event the popular conceptions are insufficient. They can be expressed in high-sounding language by the poets and moralists. Optimism makes an especially good theme for sublime writing, but optimism and pessimism are practical, every day working viewpoints. Half-considered talk about them usually tends to discredit them.

The thinkers of the world have given very careful consideration to this matter, and they have light to shed on the subject. Since most every person turns out to be either an optimist or a pessimist, it is well enough to give some attention to what they have to say.

Having thought the question through, one may decide that he was right about it in the first place. On the other hand, he may decide that he has been in the wrong camp and see fit to change his viewpoint. In any event the result would be carefully considered thinking and a better balanced viewpoint toward life and things.

We have now considered what optimism and pessimism are not. That should clear the way for raising the question of what they are. In other words, the aim is to lay the goods out on the counter so the customer may get a good look at them and make his choice in the light of the facts.

Let us begin by saying that neither viewpoint, honestly held, is to be scorned. The true optimist and the true pessimist are both honest and sincere. They look at the same facts and try with equal sincerity to interpret them rightly. They arrive at opposite conclusions concerning what they see, but they are both in search of truth and each has accepted what looked to him like the truth.

The optimist is one who looks at the world and life and sees their intermingling of light and shadow, joy and pain, success and failure, but believes that the good is predominant in them and that right will ultimately triumph. He is not blind to the discouraging phases, and he does not disregard them. He simply believes that the good and the true are strong enough to win, and that the world is moving up the years toward better and better things. In other words, the good will be victorious in spite of the bad.

The pessimist takes the opposite view. He looks at the same world and the same life and thinks he sees more bad in it than good, and that the bad in it is the stronger and will therefore triumph. He admits the beauty and the good in things, but he thinks they are weak and will go down before the advance of evil. He believes, therefore, that the outlook is gloomy and Right will be led to the scaffold while Wrong mounts the throne.

While the sincere optimist and the sincere pessimist both try to look at the facts with unbiased judgment and form conclusions based wholly on what they find them to be, they may not succeed in doing so. Either may be more affected by conditions than he realizes.

A healthy man tends toward optimism and an unhealthy one toward pessimism, and neither may know it. It is as easy to think life is good when one feels well and is filled with the zest of living as it is difficult to think all is right with the world when one has a toothache, for instance. It is said that a certain gloomy and harsh theological doctrine was founded by a man who had a nasal obstruction and was obliged throughout life to breathe through his mouth.

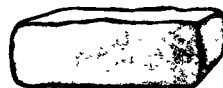
Optimism and pessimism are sometimes matters of temperament. The calm, steady spirit is apt to be optimistic, because it does not permit itself to be disturbed much by things around it. The restless temperament, on the other hand, may tend to pessimism, because it notices everything and by no means misses the unfavorable conditions to be found in our world life. Some hearts are more open to happiness, as some rooms are more open to the sunshine.

Personal conditions may help to make one an optimist or a pessimist. One who has many baffling problems and meets with frequent defeat can master his discouragement and rise to fine heights of optimistic understanding, but he may more easily slip into pessimism.

Some are optimists or pessimists according to the times they live in or prevailing world conditions at any given time. For instance, a time of war or financial depression breeds pessimism, while the tendency of people is to turn optimist when

the shadow lifts. Still others are optimists or pessimists under the influence of teachers, or admired friends, or the school of thought that challenges them. One should carefully analyze himself with reference to these things, and make his decision between optimism and pessimism for deeper reasons than the incidental facts surrounding his life. To be subject to conditions does not make for good thinking and the solid way of living to which it leads. One has to take account of the whole truth and not a few scattered fragments of it to reach a dependable conclusion.

The optimist and pessimist are not, then, people who have leaped to one-sided conclusions. They are honest searchers after truth, who look carefully at the facts and try to determine what to make of them. But one is right and the other is wrong. Which is right? The remainder of this discussion will be from the viewpoint of Optimism.



Let us look first at the field of personal experience, and see what it indicates as to the rightness of this choice. The facts found there are most familiar, for we are in the midst of them every day.

We find plenty of complaining going on. Many people are not content with their lots, or think they are not. Are they justified in the constant claim that they have nothing but trouble and in the assumption that no one else's life is so hard as theirs?

Examination of the facts shows that most of the complaining is done by people who do not really have a great deal to complain about. Some seem to enjoy being miserable, and others unconsciously slip into the habit of complaining. They magnify small matters into great mountains of trouble, and sometimes even create by imagination troubles that do not really exist.

If these people were not so blind to the whole truth about life they would see one thing that would rebuke them into silence, and perhaps even start them giving thanks for their good fortune. That is the fact that as a rule the people for whom life really is hard seldom have the complaining disposition. They are often examples of cheerfulness and courage to others.

A group of relatives went to see and comfort an old lady who had just experienced a particularly trying bereavement in the loss of the son who was her support as well as her joy in life.

"Well, did you succeed in comforting her?" asked another relative when they returned at the end of the day's visit.

"I'm afraid it didn't work out that way," was the answer. "She comforted us."

For those whose troubles are real as well as for those whose troubles are imaginary things might be very much worse than they are. No matter how bad one may feel his luck has been, he has only to look about him to see someone whose luck is ten times harder. More than likely, too, he will find that person smiling and whistling a merry tune.

"We are pressed on every side, yet not straitened;" wrote St. Paul, "perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed. * * * * Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day."

"The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones," Shakespeare has a character say at the funeral of Julius Caesar. The Bard of Avon was a very wise man, and can be questioned at not many points, but in this statement he was mistaken. Every community has frequent instances to remind us that when anyone dies people immediately stop talking about his frailties and shortcomings and begin emphasizing the good in his life; for good can always be found to emphasize, and it has the vitality to endure while the shortcomings are forgotten.

The person who is disposed to complain about his lot needs to stop and take one good look at his past life. If he does so with an open mind, he will see that the wonder of his years is not how hard a time he has had and how often Destiny has short-changed him. It will be how wonderfully he has been delivered many times when his feet were very near the brink of disaster. He will be surprised, too, to remember how kind and forgiving people have been toward him when they could very easily have been otherwise. He will also be surprised at how far he has been able to come on his way, much farther probably than he ever dreamed was possible.

If he honestly surveys his present situation, he will see that the goodness of life is not confined to the past. His life today is full of blessings, too, blessings he cannot be too sure he deserves. Moreover, it would be still more so, probably, if Providence had only had a little more and better cooperation from him. It is often true that the very things he complains about are things for which he should be giving thanks.

He will find that many others have it harder than he does, and still find much to be thankful for. This will suggest that he look about a little more carefully, and make a truer count of his own blessings.

He will find that his blessings have not been limited by either his deservings or his effort to earn the right to them. Providence is not niggardly, and life is better than the reasons would justify on any basis of mere justice.

So there is not much in personal experience to support the claim of the pessimist. The only conclusion it suggests is that all in all life is as good as we permit it to be, and even better.

Now let us take a glance at the field of history, and see which viewpoint the facts seem to favor.

One of this world's most constant laments is the one about the passing of "the good old days". That is the most natural thing in the world, for we all love what to us were "the good old days". The heart objects to change, and does not readily accommodate itself to new conditions, so it likes to look backward to vanished times.

Now take a look backward and remember "the good old days" as they were. Would

you really want them back? They had poor roads. They had inadequate plumbing or none at all. They had political and business abuses that have since been done away. The average length of human life was shorter, and the literacy rate was lower. Schools were scarcer and less efficient. All kinds of things could be cited that we forget when we grow sentimental about the past. The meaning of all this is that the world has moved on. Life has improved.

Is the world growing better or worse? One can look at certain unfavorable details and say it is growing worse. He can look at certain other details and be certain it is growing better. These are not indicative. What do we find when we look at the whole drift of human action?

People are no longer burned at the stake for what they do or do not believe. Learning is no longer throttled because it conflicts with dogmatism. People are no longer hanged for alleged witchcraft. Human slavery has been done away. One or two offenses may bring capital punishment instead of the dozens and even hundreds of only a few centuries ago. Many of the disease scourges have been brought under control, and some almost eradicated.

The world has its faults, but many other shortcomings have been left behind. Some problems remain, but many have been solved. Already others, like poverty and social injustice, are slated for destruction. That is all because the world is getting to be a better place to live in, and will continue to improve with passing time and human effort.

We have setbacks, of course. There is no denying that. A great war may undo long years of effort to establish international peace, or a moral setback may seem to undo long periods of agitation for better things. Even religion has always had individual and collective backsliding for one of its problems.

That is what we see when we take a partial view, when we observe only one set of facts or look at only one page of history. But when we take the whole situation into account we see something quite different. It is like stepping back to get the perspective of a painting. The various relationships then come into view, and we understand that, while we have backsets, the sum of our backslidings is less than the sum of our onward progress. Thus the situation at a given moment in history may seem very discouraging, but the long time view is never so. The important thing is not the condition now or at some other time. It is the general direction in which we are moving and whether on the average we are gaining ground.

Sometimes progress is made by what appear to be catastrophes at the time. The American Revolution, for instance, was a setback in the cause of peace, but it was a forward step in the cause of freedom, and therefore in the long run it may have helped in the cause of peace itself. However advancement is made, it is advancement just the same. When the storm has spent its fury the atmosphere is cleared. When the wreckage of catastrophe has been cleared away the ground is ready for building something better.

A certain mercantile firm built its business up from small beginnings until it was a leader in the town. It occupied the old, out-of-date building in which it had done business for years. One winter morning fire broke out and burned the building to the ground, destroying the stock. The owners did not even take time for discouragement. The debris was cleared out, an up-to-date building was erected

and the new store was the finest and most complete in that part of the country. The way was cleared by what looked like a catastrophe, but instead the owners of the business took it as a challenge and an opportunity. It is often so in the larger movements of the history of the race.

We know that if we should slip back more than we move forward the final result must be ruin, but we also know that if we move forward even a little more than we slip back the final result is bound to be arrival at the goal of prophet vision and poet dream, the summum bonum, or the race's highest good.

This matter you cannot determine by comparing the condition today with that of yesterday, or a year ago, or a few years ago. You can do so only by comparing the situations at widely separated intervals. For instance, if you examine the situation with reference to human progress at century intervals, you can see what is really happening to the race and know whether it is for better or worse. There is no doubt but that such a study will confirm the optimism of the person who makes it. We often say that things are not so bad but that they might be worse. We could also say that they are not so bad but that they have been worse.

Sometimes the poet is the best historian. Sometimes he is also the best prophet. It was so of Tennyson when he wrote of "the one far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves." The race does not succeed in moving in the direction of that condition every day and hour, but it does manage to keep its trend in that direction through the years and centuries. History, like the stars, is headed for some consummation out in the future. We do not have to guess what it will be. We can tell by examining the larger trends of human action and endeavor.

As a final consideration let us try to see what religion has to say on the subject. There may be limited pessimistic religions, but they are few, and small, and of little influence in the thinking and life of the race. The great religions are optimistic, and that is certainly true of the Christian faith, and the Hebrew religion out of which it grew.

The Bible is the greatest and best of all text books in Optimism. That may be a surprise to some whose study has only been of small parts of it. Let us for a moment look at the one grand sweep of its message as a whole. Read the first chapter of the first book, and the last two chapters of the last book. That will give a picture of the beginning and the climax of human history as it is worked out according to the divine purpose.

The opening words of the First Chapter of Genesis paint a picture of the beginning of created things. It is darkness, and waste, and void - with the spirit of divine love brooding over them. The last two chapters of the Book of Revelation paint a picture of the climax or consummation of history. It is a heavenly city or a new world order, come down from God and established among men, a condition so right and good that there are no more tears.

Everything else in the Bible, and everything else in human history, is the development leading from one of these conditions to the other. Life with its problems, discouragements, and setbacks, but always struggling on to something better and finally arriving - that is the broad viewpoint of the Bible, and that is the brave conception of Optimism.

That is the Bible's answer to the problem of history, to the question of what the final goal of the race will be. No matter what the present condition is, no matter what we find on any single page of the record, and no matter how many and frequent setbacks we have, the New Jerusalem is what we are headed for and where we will ultimately arrive. The Bible, is, then, the great Book of Optimism. It recognizes the undesirable in life and the world, but proclaims the final triumph of good.

The Latin poet, Ovid, in his Metamorphoses, pictures the drift of history through various ages and nature of which is suggested by a metal. His survey begins with the golden ages and tends downward to the iron age. In other words, he sees history as a descent from good to bad. The Bible pictures it just the other way, an ascent from the less desirable to the fulfillment of the human dream of happiness and right.

In drama the story with an unhappy ending is called a tragedy, and the story that comes out with problems solved, clouds dispelled, and everyone happy is called a comedy. Optimism views the long story of human life as a comedy and not a tragedy. Its pages are filled with conflict and crisis, but when the final scene is reached, the sun is shining, all hearts glad, and all wrongs made right.

The pessimist does not have much to live for at best. About all he can do is face the troubles of life and make the best of them. With the optimist it is not so. He has everything to live and work for. Assured that mankind will solve its problem, find its happiness, and realize an age-long divine plan for its good, he can gladly invest his life in furthering that purpose, even though it may not be fully realized in his time. Confidence in the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven here among men is a challenge worthy of any man's best ability and effort. It puts more meaning into life than anything else could.

So an optimist is not just a man who goes about insisting that everything is as it should be, regardless of the facts. He is a man who has seen the ultimate goal of human life, and is helping to attain it.

An upward road is a little harder to travel, as Moo Lu Akin says, but there is more pleasure in it because there is more challenge.

Let us then, Beloved Companions, ever continue on this upward path that brings so many blessings, in \triangle , in \boxtimes , and in \top .

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